

1. (Currently Amended): A back protector which comprises an upper support and a lower support, said upper and lower supports being adapted to conform to upper and lower regions of the back of a user, said upper support being substantially vertically aligned with said lower support, said upper support and lower support being provided with respective means for fixing them to the back of the user, each of said supports carrying a plurality of substantially rigid elements fixed thereto, said lower support being directly hinged to said upper support on a single pin.

2. (Previously Presented): The back protector as claimed in claim 1, wherein said rigid elements comprise plates having a strengthening grid of ribs provided at one surface thereof.

3. (Previously Presented): The back protector as claimed in claim 2, wherein the plates of each support are connected together mechanically by hinge elements.

4. (Previously Presented): The back protector as claimed in claim 1, wherein said upper support contains an intermediate layer of material which provides impact absorption.

5. (Previously Presented): The back protector as claimed in claim 1, wherein said lower support contains an intermediate layer of material which provides impact

absorption.

6. (Previously Presented): The back protector as claimed in claim 1, wherein said upper support is provided with braces.

7. (Previously Presented): The back protector as claimed in claim 1, wherein said lower support is provided with a belt.

8. (Previously Presented): The back protector as claimed in claim 1, wherein the lower support is hinged to the upper support by a pin.

9. (Previously Presented): The back protector as claimed in claim 2, wherein the grid of ribs mutually intersect to form a honeycomb structure.

10. (Previously Presented): The back protector of claim 1 wherein the upper and lower supports are adapted to conform to a human spinal column.

11. (Previously Presented): The back protector of claim 10. wherein the lower support is hinged to the upper support to move relative to the movement of the human spinal column.

12. (Previously Presented): The back protector of claim 1, wherein at least one of the upper and lower supports comprises a plurality of adjacent plates

which are hinged together.

13. (Previously Presented): The back protector of claim 11, wherein the hinge of the lower support to the upper support enables the spinal column to flex laterally and in the anterior and posterior directions.

14. (Previously Presented): A back protector comprising an upper support and a lower support, said upper support being substantially vertically aligned with said lower support, each of said supports including an anterior inner layer made of a soft expanded material, an intermediate layer of soft material and an outer layer comprising a plurality of interconnecting plates, the inner surface of each plate, which faces the intermediate layer being provided with a plurality of ribs fixed thereto, said lower support being hinged to said upper support, and means for securing the back protector to the body of a user.

15. (Previously Presented): The back protector of claim 14, wherein the plurality of interconnecting plates overlap and are flexibly connected with respect to each other.